

Claims

We claim:

- 5 229(1)
1. A computer-automated method for use by a service establishment in providing services to a customer, the method comprising:
- acquiring a signal from a device carried by the customer;
 - deriving from the signal information that allows identification of the customer;
 - using this information to identify the customer and to retrieve archived information
 - 10 about previous interactions with the customer;
 - analyzing the archived information to identify a product or service of interest to the customer; and
 - offering the product or service to the customer before the customer leaves the service establishment.
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2. The method of claim 1, where the method also includes assessing the quality-of-service received by the customer at the service establishment, and where the step of offering the product or service to the customer includes:
- deciding that the quality-of-service received by the customer was inadequate; and
 - 20 offering the product or service to the customer at a discount or at no cost.
3. The method of claim 2, where assessing the quality-of-service includes measuring the amount of time taken to serve the customer and comparing the measured amount to a threshold amount.
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4. The method of claim 3, where the method also includes using the archived information about previous interactions with the customer in calculating the threshold amount.

5. The method of claim 2, where assessing the quality-of-service received by the customer includes measuring the amount of time that the customer waits in a service lane provided by the service establishment.

5 6. The method of claim 5, where measuring the amount of time that the customer waits in the service lane includes:

initiating a time-monitoring sequence upon acquiring the signal from the device;
and

10 completing the time-monitoring sequence when the customer reaches a checkpoint in the service lane.

7. The method of claim 5, where measuring the amount of time that the customer waits in the service lane includes:

15 acquiring a signal from the device when customer reaches a first checkpoint; and
acquiring another signal from the device when the customer reaches a second checkpoint.

20 8. The method of claim 5, where measuring the amount of time that the customer waits in the service lane includes measuring the customer's waiting-time in a drive-thru service lane provided by the service establishment.

25 9. The method of claim 8, where acquiring a signal from a device carried by the customer includes acquiring a signal from a transponder carried on the customer's automobile.

10. The method of claim 1, where retrieving the archived information includes requesting the archived information from a database system.

11. The method of claim 1, where retrieving the archived information includes retrieving information collected by the service establishment during one or more previous visits by the customer.

5 12. The method of claim 1, where retrieving the archived information includes retrieving information about the customer collected and shared by more than one service establishment.

10 13. The method of claim 1, where acquiring a signal from a device carried by the customer includes acquiring a signal from a transponder of a type that is meant to be carried in the customer's pocket.

15 14. The method of claim 1, where offering the product or service to the customer includes using an electronic terminal at the service establishment to generate a printed coupon.

15. A method for use by a service establishment in measuring a customer's wait-time in a service lane, the method comprising;

20 receiving a signal from a device carried by the customer when the customer reaches a first checkpoint;

initiating a time-monitoring sequence upon receiving the signal;

receiving another signal from the device when the customer reaches a second checkpoint; and

25 completing the time-monitoring sequence upon receiving that signal.

16. The method of claim 15, further comprising:

comparing the measured wait-time to a threshold value; and

30 if the measured wait-time exceeds the threshold value, rewarding the customer with compensation for enduring a long wait.

17. The method of claim 15, further comprising:
comparing the measured wait-time to a threshold value; and
if the threshold value exceeds the measure wait-time, rewarding an employee of the
service establishment for providing exceptional service.

18. The method of claim 15, where receiving the signal at the first checkpoint
includes receiving the signal when the customer reaches a point-of-entry to the service
lane.

19. The method of claim 15, where receiving the signal at the first checkpoint
includes receiving the signal when the customer reaches a point at which customers place
orders with the service establishment.

20. The method of claim 15, where receiving the signal at the first checkpoint
includes receiving the signal when the customer reaches a service window or service
counter.

21. The method of claim 15, where receiving the signal at the second checkpoint
includes receiving the signal when the customer reaches a service window or service
counter.

22. The method of claim 15, where receiving the signal at the second checkpoint
includes receiving the signal when the customer reaches a point-of-exit from the service
lane.

23. A network of computer systems for use in providing services to customers of a group of service establishments, the network comprising:

(a) local computer systems that are located at the service establishments, each of which is configured to:

5 collect information identifying customers of the service establishment and information about previous transactions with those customers; and

when a customer is visiting the service establishment:

receive information identifying that customer;

assess whether the customer is receiving adequate service; and

10 if the customer is not receiving adequate service, assist in delivering an offer to compensate the customer for the inadequate service; and

(b) a data-warehouse system configured to:

15 receive from each of the local computer systems the information about the products and services purchased by customers and the information identifying those customers; and

20 when a customer is visiting one of the service establishments, receive from the service establishment the information identifying that customer and, in response, deliver to the service establishment information about the products or services previously purchased by that customer for use in delivering the offer to the customer.

24. A computer system for use by a service establishment in providing services to a customer, the system including an executable program that causes the computer to:

receive a signal acquired from a device carried by the customer;

receive information that allows identification of the customer;

5 use this information to identify the customer and to retrieve archived information about previous interactions with the customer;

analyze the archived information to identify a product or service of interest to the customer; and

10 before the customer leaves the service establishment, create an offer to deliver the product or service to the customer.

25. The system of claim 24, where the computer also assesses the quality-of-service received by the customer at the service establishment, and, in offering the product or service to the customer, the computer:

15 decides that the quality-of-service received by the customer was inadequate; and

creates an offer to deliver the product or service to the customer at a discount or at no cost.

26. The system of claim 25, where, in assessing the quality-of-service, the computer
20 measures the amount of time taken to serve the customer and compares the measured amount to a threshold amount.

27. The system of claim 26, where the computer uses the archived information about previous interactions with the customer in calculating the threshold amount.

25 28. The system of claim 25, where, in assessing the quality-of-service received by the customer, the computer measures the amount of time that the customer waits in a service lane provided by the service establishment

29. The system of claim 28, where, in measuring the amount of time that the customer waits in the service lane, the computer:

initiates a time-monitoring sequence upon receiving the signal acquired from the device carried by the customer; and

5 ends the time-monitoring sequence when the customer reaches a checkpoint in the service lane.

30. The system of claim 28, where, in measuring the amount of time that the customer waits in the service lane, the computer:

10 receives a signal acquired from the device the customer reaches a first checkpoint; and

receives another signal acquired from the device when the customer reaches a second checkpoint.

15 31. The system of claim 28, where, in measuring the amount of time that the customer waits in a service lane, the computer measures the customer's waiting-time in a drive-thru service lane provided by the service establishment.

20 32. The system of claim 31, where, in receiving a signal acquired from a device carried by the customer, the computer receives a signal acquired from a transponder carried on the customer's automobile.

33. The system of claim 24, where the computer requests the archived information from a database system.

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34. The system of claim 24, where, in retrieving the archived information, the computer retrieves information collected by the service establishment during one or more previous visits by the customer.

35. The system of claim 24, where, in retrieving the archived information, the computer retrieves information about the customer collected and shared by more than one service establishment.

5 36. A computer system for use by a service establishment in measuring a customer's wait-time in a service lane, the system including an executable program that causes the computer to:

 receive a first signal acquired from a device carried by the customer when the customer reaches a first checkpoint;

10 initiate a time-monitoring sequence upon receiving the first signal;

 receive a second signal acquired from the device when the customer reaches a second checkpoint; and

 end the time-monitoring sequence upon receiving the second signal.

15 37. The system of claim 36, where the computer receives the first signal when the customer reaches a point-of-entry to the service lane.

 38. The system of claim 36, where the computer receives the first signal when the customer reaches a point at which customers place orders with the service establishment.

20 39. The system of claim 36, where the computer receives the first signal when the customer reaches a service window or service counter.

 40. The system of claim 36, where the computer receives the second signal when
25 the customer reaches a service window or service counter.

 41. The system of claim 36, where the computer receives the second signal when the customer reaches a point-of-exit from the service lane.